Mary Had a Little Lamb

I like to start with this song when students are beginning to play songs on boomwhackers. I like to start with a song that is familiar to them and without notation so that they can learn how boomwhackers work (long=low and short=high) and how they really are an instrument and not just a tube. I also like to do it with just the color coded letter names instead of true notation so that they have less information to take in and process at one time.

Materials:

Boomwhackers or color coordinated resonator bars

Color coded letter name sheet music (or, have this prepared to project—I haven’t done this on the SMART board yet, but it could easily be done that way, too!)

The music looks something like this:

E D C D E E E-

D D D E G G

E D C D E E E E

D D E D C---

(Note: I did the dashes to show the longer notes. I also did NOT write the letter name with the color of the boomwhacker—mainly because yellow is really hard to read from a distance. I have found it works better if the letters are in black and the color is lightly around it.)

Procedure:

Sing through Mary Had a Little Lamb (this should be a familiar song to most of the students.)

Sing through the song again, but substitute the letter names for the words (for example, instead of “Mary had a little lamb, little lamb” have the students sing “E D C D E E E D D D”. While the students are singing, I point at the letter names and sing them as well. This helps enforce the left to right reading skill. Be mindful that you are not blocking the students view. My students know that if they can’t see because I’m in their way, that they always have permission to move.

Ask for some volunteers to be the demonstration group. I usually choose students who will likely be successful with this on their first attempt.

Introduce the boomwhackers and review the rules.

(Note: Usually before I expect the students to play a “real” song, they have had some exploratory time with the boomwhackers.)

Assign a boomwhacker to each volunteer.

Confirm that the students know what boomwhacker they have. I usually say, “if you are C, play”. Then, “if you are E, play”. Continue until all are reviewed. I purposefully don’t go in the same order each time, nor do I necessarily go in the order that the notes appear in the song.

Have the demonstration group play, others sing letter names, and teacher point at music simultaneously. I invite students who are playing to also sing the letter names if they can play and sing at the same time, but I always tell them that they don’t have to.

At this point, for a first boomwhacker song experience, I usually have those volunteers sit down (after only playing one color boomwhacker) and ask for volunteers to take their places until everyone who wants a turn has had one. I often let the students choose who will take their place and they can help the new student get settled. IDEALLY you have more than one set of boomwhackers so you can have 2 or more students on each color--students feel less pressure if they are not the only one on their part. When students are not playing then they are saying letter names. Continue until all students have had a turn. I don’t force them to have a turn if they are very fearful or just need more time to feel comfortable. Also note, I continue to point EACH of these times (it’s new students playing each time).

Then, depending on your time, number of students, number of instruments, etc., you have some choices.

\*You can set up a rotation where students move “through” the colors of boomwhackers in some systematic way. Maybe the students play C, then D, then E, then G, then sit out. As students move off of C, then new students move in. Or, students can play C, then trade with a partner who then plays C, then the partnership moves up to D, and so on. Note: I continue to point but phase myself out—I challenge them to try it without me pointing, though I stay nearby and will point when it seems like I am needed. Students continue to say letter names each time.

\*Add other instruments—students can play a steady beat on the drum, or the rhythm on sticks, or the letter names on xylophone. I ALWAYS have a group of students saying letter names.

\*As students gain confidence and experience, they can try it without the teacher pointing, or without students saying letter names, or with neither of those supports.

\*You can have student conductors who can point at the letter names. They might also change the tempo.